

Institution: Newcastle University
Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: Reassessing the Pipers: Influencing and shaping British cultural heritage
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The artist John Piper, and his wife, the editor, anthologist and librettist Myfanwy Piper were key figures within the cultural field of mid-twentieth-century Britain. The research on which this case study is based brought to public attention their reclaiming for British art a sense of place, national identity and belonging. Through her books, essays, public lectures, journalism, appearances at literary and arts festivals and on radio and television Frances Spalding's research on the Pipers and their contribution to British culture has made a major impact on public life. The research has influenced cultural, heritage, and media organisations, directly altered policy on conservation of heritage, and shaped the cultural understanding of informed audiences, both in Britain and abroad.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Frances Spalding was appointed to Newcastle University in 2000 and holds a position as Professor of Art History. The largest body of underpinning research for this impact was published in Frances Spalding's book <i>John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art (1)</i>, based on research carried out at Newcastle University. This research was ambitious owing to the far-reaching nature of Spalding's enquiry. Unlike previous authors in this field, she did not confine her interest to John Piper's fertile career as an artist, but studied the full range of outputs which he and Myfanwy Piper produced, either separately or together. Spalding was the first person to have access to the Pipers' own archive, covering 50 years and a huge range of correspondents, and it has since been acquired for the nation under the Government's Acceptance-in-Lieu scheme.</p> <p>Equal attention was given to every medium, be it stage design, photography, textiles, stained-glass, murals, magazines, anthologies, architectural journalism or librettos. Extensive original research made possible a nuanced account of the complex interaction between the Pipers and other artists, patrons, critics, churchmen, craftspersons, organisations, committees, locations, and period issues. One major theme was the move away from an explicit engagement with International Modernism, to a stance more open to the past, to place, native traditions and the needs of the human psyche.</p> <p>Previously only superficial attention had been paid to John Piper's passion for architecture and his work for the Shell County Guides. The research uncovered the depth of his involvement with the built environment and showed how he contributed to a sea-change in the public's perception of Britain's architectural heritage. It investigated in detail, for the first time, his major stained-glass commissions during the post-war reconstruction period, including his work for the new Coventry Cathedral. The validity of the argument in this book often rests on a perceptive synthesis of the historical, cultural, political and intellectual issues of the day. Biographical detail is repeatedly enhanced by its contextual setting. This study amounts to a compendium of information. It has been ransacked for many purposes, not least for factual evidence to support the growing interest in the way British artists and writers began to challenge modernist orthodoxies during the late 1930s and 1940s.</p> <p>This research built on the 2003 exhibition Spalding had co-curated with David Fraser Jenkins for Dulwich Picture Gallery - 'John Piper in the 1930s: Abstraction on the Beach' (2). This drew attention to Piper's interest in 'Nautical Style' and emphasized the maritime influence on modern art, architecture and design. It inspired an interdisciplinary conference, 'Modernism at the Seaside', at the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill. Spalding contributed to this, and to the book of essays that resulted from it (3) and has continued to collaborate with other interdisciplinary projects, such as the essay collection <i>From Self to Shelf: The Construction of the Artist</i> (2008) (4).</p>

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The breadth of the research, not only opened up the Pipers' careers for cultural historians, it also pointed up aspects of John Piper's work that are still topical today, among them his involvement with the debate over preservation or conservation and the current attempts to revive the dialogue between the Church and contemporary art and artists. Spalding was also the first to give proper attention to Myfanwy Piper's contribution to English culture, as editor, anthologist, critic and librettist, dedicating three chapters in her book to Myfanwy Piper's collaboration with Benjamin Britten on three operas, also publishing in an anthology an essay specifically on Myfanwy Piper's contribution to *Owen Wingrave* (5).

3. References to the research

- 1) Frances Spalding (2009), *John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art*, Oxford University Press. 978-0199567621. Recently republished in paperback. REF2 Output: 170340.
- 2) David Fraser Jenkins and Frances Spalding, (2003) *John Piper in the 1930s: Abstraction of the Beach*, Dulwich Pictures Gallery & Merrell Publishing. Available from HEI on request.
- 3) Frances Spalding (2009), 'In the Nautical Tradition: John Piper' in Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris, ed. *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*. Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 135-143. 978-1906165406. Available from HEI on request.
- 4) Frances Spalding (2008), 'Mondrian's Grocer', in *From Self to Shelf: The Construction of the Artist*, ed. Sally Bayley and William May, Cambridge Scholars Press, preface and essay. Available from HEI on request.
- 5) Frances Spalding (2009), 'Dramatic Invention in Myfanwy Piper's Libretto for *Owen Wingrave*', in *Benjamin Britten: New Perspectives on His Life and Work*, edited by Lucy Walker, Boydell and Brewer and the Britten-Pears Foundation. 978-1843835165. Available from HEI on request.

Grants:

Principal Investigator	Grant Title	Sponsor	Period of Grant	Value
Frances Spalding	A Biography of John and Myfanwy Piper (BH91277)	Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)	May 2001 to June 2002	£8,151
Frances Spalding	John and Myfanwy Piper: A Joint Biography (BH051726)	Paul Mellon Foundation Senior Fellowship	September 2005 to August 2006	£27,500

4. Details of the impact

This research has directly benefitted a number of different audiences in their understanding and appreciation of mid-20th century British cultural life; it has heightened perception of Britain's cultural heritage, and developed new audiences for British art and architecture.

General public

The research continues to reach wide audiences through publications, reviews, exhibitions, the media and through conferences and literary festivals. Impact began before the book was published in October 2009, with requests for preview articles: on John Piper's wartime paintings for *History Today* (September 2009); on his work for the Sitwells at Renishaw for the *Daily Telegraph*; and with a double-page spread on Myfanwy ('Golden Girl' *Guardian*, 29 August 2009) (IMP1). Orders for the book, placed before publication, created a need to reprint two weeks after publication, the hardback edition being reprinted four times before the paperback appeared, taking sales into five figures (10037 copies, as at 7 July 2013) (IMP2). The book continues to be widely stocked in retail outlets. Public Lending Right figures show that up to 30 June 2012 the book was publicly loaned 3364 times (IMP3).

The impact of this project can also be assessed from the reviews of *John Piper, Myfanwy Piper*:

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Lives in Art which appeared in almost every national newspaper, as well as many regional newspapers and leading magazines and periodicals. The *Sunday Times* called it an 'excellent and expert biography' (4 October 2009); the *Times Literary Supplement* (16 December 2009) claimed 'Spalding's approach, sifting and collating a vast quantity of material, has produced a valuable and deeply researched account of the Pipers' life together.' Timothy Mowl in the *Times Higher Educational* (28 September 2009) *Supplement* mentioned the 'excellence of this double biography' and claimed 'Spalding's engrossing and scholarly study presents an artist who relished and skilfully crafted the complex textures of England, where he lived, and Wales... this timely book engenders optimism.' (IMP1).

Invitations to speak at conferences, seminars, festivals, to learned societies, including the Ecclesiastical Architects and Surveyors Association, and arts organisations, immediately followed publication. Over the next three years Spalding delivered close to 50 talks related to this book, across England and Wales on some aspect of this project, at Blenheim Palace, Dorchester Abbey, Renishaw Hall, at universities, art clubs, on behalf of the Art Fund, and at some 25 literary festivals. Audiences ranged from 60 to 500 (Jericho Art Week, Oxford) and averaged 200. Most of her appearances at literary festivals sold out, and many of them led to further requests and projects. Other beneficiaries of her research have been music lovers. She has enhanced audience appreciation of Britten's operas by using her research into Myfanwy Piper's three libretti for him in pre-performance talks, for English National Opera and London's King's Place. She has also spoken at three conferences on Britten, alongside musicologists (IMP4).

Saving Piper's work in sacred buildings

Some beneficiaries of this research were those who had a connection with its subject. John Piper's stained-glass commissions, for example, had involved him with many sacred buildings. Over time the history of these commissions had either been forgotten or the intentions behind the work had been obscured. Spalding's research impacted on ancient medieval churches, a school chapel, two modern cathedrals, and three Oxbridge colleges.

The chapel at Nuffield College, Oxford, designed by Piper in 1961 in an upper room, had become neglected and its use was being reconsidered when Spalding, invited to lecture in the college, delivered a talk titled 'Sacred or Superstitious? John Piper and the Making of Sacred Spaces'. She was asked to repeat this lecture during the college's Alumni weekend and to advise on the chapel's restoration. A year later, she was invited to the 50th anniversary celebration of the chapel, involving a service, at which the Bishop of Oxford presided. Recently, Richard Mayou, Chairman of the Art Committee, wrote 'to record our gratitude to you for helping us to a much greater understanding and awareness of our remarkable John Piper designed chapel' (IMP5).

Spalding's work similarly impacted on the chapel at Churchill College, Cambridge. Here Piper devised stained-glass for Richard Sheppard's building. In the planning stage, this chapel had been the source of a public controversy, certain Fellows regarding it as unnecessary and Francis Crick, the discoverer of DNA, resigning his Fellowship in protest. A direct result of Spalding's book was the decision at Churchill College, in 2012, to mount a weekend of events celebrating the 40th anniversary of its chapel, beginning with a lecture by Spalding (Publicity material in IMP4). This same year Spalding opened the exhibition celebrating the 50th anniversary of Coventry Cathedral with a talk about Piper's Baptistery Window. In 2012 the former Bishop of Oxford invited her to contribute to a day of public lectures, entitled 'Thinking Theologically about Modern Art', at Gresham College in London, and her talk was afterwards published in full by the College on YouTube (1,190 views to date) (Correspondence with the Rt. Rev Richard Harries in IMP4).

Advising media on presentation of British art history

As a result of the book publication Spalding was invited to take part in the programme 'Start the Week' (BBC Radio 4 – audience figures 2 million) (IMP6), to appear on television programme 'Countryfile' (BBC2, audience ratings, according to transmission time, range between 6 and 9 million), talking about John Piper's interest in the Rollright Stones, and to contribute to three arts programmes on radio. She also accepted an invitation to act as a consultant to David Dimbleby in connection with his television series 'The Seven Ages of Britain' (audience ratings 5 million for

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each programme, the highest figure so far for an arts series) and to contribute to the chapter on the twentieth-century for the accompanying book, *Seven Ages of Britain: the story of our nation revealed by its treasures* by David Dimbleby (**IMP7**).

Advising cultural and heritage organisations

As a result of her research into the Pipers and British art more broadly Spalding is regularly invited to deliver lectures in support of the Art Fund, a national body which exists to benefit public galleries and museums and impacts on tourism in Britain (**IMP8**). She is regularly approached by auction houses for advice of the correct attribution of works of art. She has advised the Government Committee for the Export of Works of Art and sits on the Newcastle and Northumberland Diocesan Advisory Committee in her role as a specialist in art and architecture. Her recent essay 'A Crisis of Belonging' forms part of the catalogue to the current 'Crisis of Brilliance' exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery, on which she also advised, and she is frequently asked for advice on John Piper exhibitions. Leaving aside those in private galleries, the last three years have seen Piper exhibitions at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley; in Hereford Museum; in Kent, where a tri-part exhibition was held simultaneously at Mascalls Gallery, Paddock Wood, Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery and at Scotney Castle, Lamberhurst; at Blenheim Palace; Cardiff Art Gallery & Museum; Dorchester Abbey, which mounted the exhibition 'John Piper and the Church'. Spalding lectured at all these venues and was instrumental in the decision to proceed with the Dorchester Abbey exhibition. A report on this event explains how she came to the attention of the Abbey, was invited to visit it, met with a small party of people and how her 'encouragement...did more than anything else to convince the trustees that it was a good idea' (**IMP9**).

Aside from prestigious public lectures given at English universities, Spalding has also received invitations from abroad. She lectured on British art at Smith College in Massachusetts; at the request of the Polish Ministry of Culture, in Krakow, and was invited to give the prestigious annual Seymour lecture on biography at the National Library of Australia in Canberra. (Invitation in **IMP4**). Further significant evidence of the impact made by her Pipers book is the fact that, soon after it was published, she was invited to join the Leverhulme Trust's Advisory Panel. The underpinning research's contribution to the art history field nationally and internationally is well recognised (**IMP10**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (IMP1) A list of reviews of *John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art*, compiled by Oxford University Press. Available on request.
- (IMP2) Book sales of *John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art*. Supplied by Oxford University Press. Available on request.
- (IMP3) Public Lending Right figures. Available on request.
- (IMP4) Selection from files of Spalding's correspondence from readers. Available on request.
- (IMP5) Email from Richard Mayou, Emeritus Fellow, Nuffield College, Oxford, concerning Spalding's role in the restoration of the college chapel. Available on request.
- (IMP6) BBC Radio 4, Start the Week (18/01/2010). Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00pxj6d>
- (IMP7) *Seven Ages of Britain: the story of our nation revealed by its treasures* by David Dimbleby, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2009). Acknowledgement of contribution by Spalding on page 250.
- (IMP8) Representative email (28 February 2013) from Regional Secretary of The Art Fund reporting on Frances Spalding's lecture (McCrum Lecture Theatre, Cambridge, 27.02.13). Available on request.
- (IMP9) Report by Hugo Brunner, on the Dorchester Abbey exhibition, 'John Piper and the Church'. Acknowledgement of Spalding's role is found in the opening paragraph.
- (IMP10) The editor of the *Burlington Magazine*, the leading refereed art history journal, can comment on Spalding's impact on the art history profession nationally and internationally.